

Prison Bus to Shitville

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PRISON BUS TO SHITVILLE: THE EMERGENCY, UNPLANNED TRANSFER FROM OSP TO SOCF THAT WASN'T DESIGNED IN ANY WAY TO FUCK MY LIFE

Words, filtered through a couple weeks of low-intensity trauma:

Tuesday night/Wednesday morning, I awoke at 3:45, disoriented, pulling earplugs out of my ears. Dazed, I staggered to the door. Warden Jay Lowdown was there, speaking. "Words words words, something something words."

When I said, "Huh?," he repeated:

"Today you're being transferred to the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville."

Me: "Uh, why am I being selectively punished?"

"You're not," answered Jay Lowdown. He looked a lot taller in his pictures. I also noticed he had the beginnings of a moustache. I remember thinking he needed to quit it. "You're going from one Level 4 institution to another one."

Me: "Yeah. Okay. But it still sucks. And it feels pretty selective."

"We thought you might say that," Jay replied. "That's why 37 others are going with you."

Behind him, I saw deputy wardens, unit staff, and Special Response Teams (SRTs). The SRTs wear black fatigues and hats, paramilitary style. They are also sometimes called STAR, "Special Tactical something Response." I think the "A" stands for "Asshole." They typically prefer STAR to SRT, because it feels more glamorous when they have STAR on their hats. They go shopping or walk into bars or wait for pedicures at their favorite beauty shops and their hats announce them as STARs.

A couple of them came to my cell and within moments, everything I owned was crammed in boxes, the last time I would ever see half of my property. Within minutes, I was standing in my cell with a half a roll of toilet paper and a lot of empty space. The STAR assholes moved on to the next cell like a biblical swarm of locusts dispatched by a loving, murderous god. I stood there, confused.

I was going to Lucasville.

Lucasville, home of the [1993 prisoner uprising](#), still an open wound in the warped, malformed psyche of Ohio's torture industrial complex. It's also the location where Danny Grimm was beaten half to death at intake, for no reason at all, and ended up getting the [largest jury award](#) in U.S. history for a prisoner assaulted by prison staff. It's the place where prison officials attempted to send [Timothy "Little Rock" Reed](#), a published prisoner writer, so they could have him murdered. In a case like no other in history, Little Rock was granted asylum in New Mexico.

Lucasville is still the place they'd send a prisoner writer like Little Rock if they wanted him dead.

Sucks to be me.

STARs came behind the packing crew and looped orange transport clothes through our door handles. Thirty-eight of us.

I had never seen any shit like this. Unit managers and case managers hefted our boxed property onto carts and hauled them away.

Transfers work like this: There are long periods of intolerable waiting punctuated with flurries of ridiculous and very-stressful activity. And then back

to mind-numbing waiting again. So, once my property was packed and whisked away to get damaged and destroyed and torn to pieces by luggage consultants moonlighting from the local airport and a pack of chimpanzees from the local zoo, there was at least a lifetime for imagining the interminable terrors that would follow before the next flurry of nonsense.

STARs came cell to cell, stripping us out. They take your blues and watch you get naked, open your mouth... Fingers through hair... Lift nuts... Wiggle fingers... Turn, showing bottoms of feet... Squat and cough while spreading your butt cheeks. Then they toss you orange transport clothing and orange slipper shoes. If you're lucky, you get a left and a right and at least one of them fits.

They herded everyone from my range who was transferring into a fiberglass fishbowl, recreation cage A. The upper range transfers got herded into recreation cage B.

There are twelve of us from pod 7, out of sixteen prisoners. Doing calculations, they'd be taking prisoners from the other Level 4A pods– from 4, 6, and 8. Umar and Klown from my range are nearly blind, but the STAR fuckweasels claim they are not allowed eyeglasses on transports. Some unidentified asshole claimed to be a supervisor and said glasses are never permitted on transports, despite my own experience of a dozen transports with guys wearing glasses.

Breakfast: peanutbutter, grits, 2 slices of bread. Nobody drinks the milk. That's a transport protocol: no breakfast fluids. We would be on a prison bus all day. In years past, I've been on transfers where piss was sloshing forward and back on the floorboards... or where a prisoner with the shits left a steaming, stinking pile under a bus seat... or where a death row prisoner sick from anesthesia puked everywhere.

So, words of wisdom, if you're getting on a prison bus:

1. Don't drink the fluids at breakfast.
2. Evacuate all bodily wastes at the last available opportunity.
3. Hope everyone else does too.

Next, we went out one at a time to get shackled up. First, cuffs in front. Then

the "black box" on the cuffs, put on wrong to make the cuffs dig in. Then, bellychain looped through the box. Finally, shackles, also known as ankle-biters, put on tight to make the ankles bleed.

We then stood facing a wall for a couple centuries.

Eventually, STARs escorted us to the elevator. As soon as it opened, the bewildering cold from below rattled through us. With a straight face, I asked one of the STAR goons if we were going to have to wear those big, bulky transport coats just because it was freezing cold. He really didn't know I was being sarcastic. When he answered, "No," several prisoners laughed.

In the garage, arctic air blasted us. We shuffled to the bus in shackles. Major Drooling Erection was there standing next to Deputy Warden Bracie, as usual. He said, "Hey Swain, that [piece you wrote](#) was really funny." He was speaking of the article where I described him drooling over Ms. Bracie (and don't tell his wife). As I got on the prison bus to Shitville, I yelled back, "Yeah, I can see how much you enjoyed it."

We sat one to a seat since the seats were only wide enough to seat one and a half adults. The STARs provided each of us a plastic container to piss in. Some prisoners complained that their containers already smelled of piss. Someone else's piss.

Nothing but the best on a prison bus.

Internally, a prison bus is not the school bus of your youth. There are crash gates welded into place, every five or ten seats, dividing the passenger space into different sections, each of those gates locked before the bus gets rolling. There's metal grating welded to the windows. There's even a metal bar welded over the safety hatch in the ceiling. The passenger compartment is separated from the driver's space by another metal gate welded in and locked. The front of the bus can hold up to four guards including the driver.

So, we get to the question: what if something happens during a prison bus ride? Well, the short answer is, you're fucked. The longer answer is, you're really fucked.

The bus isn't stopping for a medical emergency. No one is going to administer

medical care. The only people who might care about your welfare are chained, cuffed, and shackled. You'll have to hold on until you reach your destination– in an hour... or five...

And that goes even for an emergency created by the geniuses driving the prison bus. Consider, with 24 prisoners on board and 4 guards, any emergency response to a serious accident would focus on the guards first. That means you won't get help until at least five ambulances show up. But if another vehicle is involved, and if one person in that vehicle is hurt, that pushes your assistance back to the sixth ambulance.

Now consider: There may be 24 prisoners. You may not get the first ambulance devoted to helping prisoners. If you're in the back of a prison bus with a full load, you get the thirtieth ambulance.

How many ambulances do you think they have in Podunk, Shitville, and the surrounding community? Exactly.

If the bus crashes on Wednesday, you may get extracted from the wreckage by Saturday, weather permitting. Chances are better that you'll end up getting eaten by wolves.

We sat on a cold bus, shivering.

Out the window to the right, all of our property was stacked up in packing boxes. Next to those sat our televisions, stacked neatly.

We waited for about 3 decades on that cold bus while STARS loaded the remainder of the 38 transfer prisoners into the vans.

For reference, if given the choice between the prison bus or the prison van, take the bus. It's more drafty and you rattle around, but you have more space. Typically, you're crammed shoulder to shoulder in the prison van, with knees grinding against the seat or caging in front of you.

Sucks.

The garage door rattled up, the bus fired up, and we were immediately fooled into thinking the trip had begun. We rolled out of the garage and waved goodbye to our property still sitting on the concrete. We didn't know it then, but it would be a long, long time before we saw any of our stuff again.

The bus rolled out of the garage and stopped.

The sun was up— somewhere. Snow flurries blew everywhere, creating white-out conditions. Guards got out of the lead vehicle and strolled importantly around the bus, holding AR15 rifles with laser scopes. Some of them had combat webbing with flash-bang grenades and an array of other nonsense. If you are ever confronting live fire from assholes who work for the prison complex, the safest place to be is in the middle of their laser sights. You want that laser dot right in the center of your forehead. The reason being, none of those lazy fucks actually site in the rifles to their own eyes, so odds are that where they are aiming is NOT where they are actually shooting. Probability is, they'll lock on YOU as a target, pull the trigger, and blow MY brains out.

Not that I use them.

Conversation on the bus turned to the fate of our personal property. The fantastical optimists among us insisted that our property was already loaded in the undercarriage of the bus. But their hopes were dashed when Steve, in the seat in front of me, described how he had written "1 of 3," "2 of 3," and "3 of 3" on his boxes, and he distinctly saw those boxes sitting on the curb when we rolled away. I had also seen my green Zenith television, a veritable dinosaur even in prison, a singular oddity, sitting on the curb.

We sat quietly, contemplating the implications... how long we might end up wearing the socks and underwear that we had on, before we ever could expect access to the rest of our stuff...

Another fantastical optimist claimed to have seen a box truck, and he theorized that they had moved us out of the garage to load our property into the box truck. So, by that theory, we were waiting to embark due to concerns by prison super-fascists (who just fucked us sideways) over our future creature comforts.

Optimists. They really do march into the "shower," and they really believe the stormtroopers handed out soap for us to use it. And they think that Zyklon B gas seeping out of the vents is just steam...

Optimists.

A guard with a rifle and way too much equipment climbed onto the bus. He was immediately peppered with marginally-relevant questions, even though he clearly knew nothing. He had grenades and web gear and canteens. His name immediately became Boom Beach.

Boom Beach didn't know how long the trip was.

Boom Beach didn't know what was happening with our property.

Boom Beach didn't know the name of the Los Angeles Dodger in the 1970s who broke the career pinch-hit record.

The correct answers were: Forever, wood-chipper, and Manny Mota.

After Boom Beach left, the topic turned to how long the trip takes from Youngstown to Lucasville. A variety of imprisoned travel experts weighed in. Some said it takes three and a half hours. Someone else said five. Some said six.

The determinative question was, were we going "straight shot" or "hub." Straight shot, we'd go from Youngstown to Lucasville without stopping to pick up other prisoners. Hub, we would pick up others and then lay-over at the corrections medical center for several hours, then board the bus to Lucasville. I had experienced too many hubs. I took the hub from Toledo to Mansfield. We drove from Toledo, passed Mansfield, and arrived in Columbus. I then waited for Mansfield prisoners to experience medical neglect before we loaded up on the Mansfield bus and drove back in the same direction I just came from.

I awoke in Toledo before 4:00 am. I arrived in Mansfield just before midnight. I had spent that entire time cuffed, chained, and shackled.

Hubs suck.

I listened to prisoners debate whether we'd take the straight shot to Lucasville, or take the hub. For all anyone knew, we would be driven to a local landfill and shot. So, I yelled to the driver and asked him if we were taking a straight shot or the hub. The driver turned his head slightly to the right and said, "Straight shot."

I believed him. I believed him not because guards are honest or have integrity, but because this guy was morbidly obese and he had turned his head the

minimal amount while yelling the minimum number of words at the lowest possible decible level to be heard. This confirmed for me that this specimen was NOT ambitious.

Whatever else liars are, they have ambitions. This guy was too lazy to lie about the bus ride.

I gave it an 80% chance we'd go straight shot.

The debate resumed as to whether a straight shot to Lucasville would take three and a half hours or five hours.

Nobody predicted nine.

I predicted that we would get there sometime around Saturday. Lots of prisoners laughed. Those with the most prison bus experience only grinned, without humor.

We finally embarked with a lead vehicle, three vans following us, and a trail vehicle. The convoy was more militarized than the Ferguson police department. When we hit stop and go city traffic, a bank sign announced the time as 9:34 am. I had been awake for roughly six hours and we had traveled a grand total of two miles. At that rate, we would arrive in Lucasville, not on Saturday as I predicted, but in late June.

Youngstown, as far as industrial northern cities go, looks like a rape victim. At one time a thriving steel town, it's been slapped around and forcibly penetrated by a predatory economic order that left Youngstown listless in the corner, its clothes torn, its face bleeding.

If you don't look closely, everything appears okay. But the houses... roofs are missing shingles. Porches lack paint. Flags are faded and ragged. We're talking about properties trying desperately to hold onto their value for dear life— but slipping. There's an incredible sucking sound as the population evacuates the downtown area with darkened, empty storefronts like molars knocked out of the city's mouth.

Swivelization has unraveled here, but the people of Youngstown, swiveled to the end, have committed to going down shopping and working, even if the only job prospects are at the super-duper-max.

Outside of Youngstown we saw empty interstate for a minute before we got to

Akron. Housing developments, shopping mall, stores, the standard Americana— but somehow it felt desperate. Just one breath beyond Akron and the landscape changed: smatterings of ranch-style homes littering the countryside between hills and forests, the yards surrounded with broken fences, tire swings with the rope dry-rotted and the tire left like a homicide victim under the tree, basketball backboards over garage doors with the rusty hoops slumping from time and disuse.

Swivelization, like an alarm clock unwinding... slowly... ticking... down...

Hills, forests, beautiful open fields under blowing snow, then we would encounter another Shitville, one after another, Shitville after Shitville, Fucksburg after Fucksburg, half-abandoned towns huddled against the wind and snowfall and arctic freeze, shitholes on the verge of extinction.

I thought about these abandoned homes in disrepair, thousands of potential squats in the middle of nowhere, Paper Street Soap Companies waiting on Tyler Durdens and Marla Singers to arrive, under the radar, off the grid, no law enforcement for miles and miles. I thought about how these half-abandoned spots could be centers for hastening the collapse of swivelization.

Bring lots of guns.

I estimated our average highway travel speed appeared to be about 35 miles an hour. We crept along at a speed just fast enough that the speed of the planet's rotation, being what it is, didn't roll us backward, causing us to arrive back in Youngstown before lunch.

Even fantastical optimists adjusted their estimates to five hours. I stuck with my prediction that we would arrive on Saturday. Fewer prisoners laughed. By the time my stomach was groaning for lunch, my feet were numb. The only thing the prison bus could out-run was its heater.

Another bit of advice: Don't bother trying to sleep on a prison bus. You have a greater chance harnessing the latent powers of your mind to bend a steel spoon than you do sleeping on a prison bus. Prison buses have the identical make and model of shock absorbers to those used by covered wagons in the westward settlement of America. And there is not a single chuckhole on a single highway anywhere on the continent that the driver of a prison bus didn't

swerve in order to hit.

Passengers on a prison bus are reduced to bobble-heads, bouncing around, chains jangling like Dickens ghosts. To get the full experience, you'd have to sit in a doctor's waiting room, wrapped in chains with the heat off, during a nine-hour 6.4 magnitude earthquake.

We arrived in Caldwell, Ohio about two hours after my stomach started screaming for food. Caldwell is a former coal town gone ghost, now home to Noble Correctional. Noble is built just like other level two shitholes—Belmont, Richland—packing hundreds of prisoners into pre-fab barns with rows of bunk beds. All those prisons were built along the same general blueprint, slapped together by the same inept profiteers with insider contracts.

We stopped at Noble for gas. No shit.

The bus ride was so ill-conceived, so last-minute, they scrambled the prison bus from Mansfield in the middle of the night, in a snowstorm, to haul ass to Youngstown. It arrived with a quarter tank. So, instead of heading out straight toward Lucasville, we had to travel due south down the eastern border of Ohio in order to get gas in Caldwell.

After the bus got gas, we backed away from the pump to allow the rest of the fuckweasel convoy to top off. As we sat, prisoners asked about lunch. One of the guards, stuffing his own face, told us we'd be taken inside the prison and given lunch. A short time later, another guard, also stuffing his face, assured us that bag lunches were prepared and would be passed out to us.

Of course, we rolled away without lunch. The assholes at Noble Correctional didn't have lunches made. The transfer was so ill-conceived in the middle of the night that no one had time to slap us some sandwiches together.

No lunch for us.

If you're diabetic, make a mental note that on any given prison transfer, you may just arrive in a coma. But, on the bright side, you'll miss out on hours and hours of slow-roasted suffering experienced by everyone else.

So, we rolled out of Caldwell at the death-defying speed of 35 miles an hour, headed away from Shitville, passing through Shitville, with our final

destination: Shitville. But we weren't driving straight toward that destination. To travel southwest at an angle was just too many watts for the bus driver's tiny little speakers. So, instead we headed due south and, at some point before driving into Kentucky, we would head west.

Fuck "the shortest distance between two points" and all that shit.

We were in uncharted territory. We would travel south until we smelled it, then turn right until we stepped in it. My estimate of arriving on Saturday was looking more and more realistic.

Outside of Caldwell, we picked up a police escort. Two Highway Patrol cars with lights flashing led us through several counties. There may have even been a helicopter. You would have thought they were transporting the Joker, the Riddler, the Penguin, Cat Woman, and Mr. Freeze— all on one bus.

Ridiculous. Nobody had ever seen anything like it in prison bus history.

We passed the time listening to the stories of veterans of the Lucasville experience. Several prisoners had been there before. So, we heard tales across the decades, from the '80s, '90s, and since the turn of the century. They told us who the assholes among the staff are. Or, more accurately, who the assholes are NOT.

We rolled up to the prison about sundown— cold, exhausted, hungry, and sore from the restraints digging in everywhere. We got escorted in to sit on benches as winter winds screamed through the hallway and snapped at our clothes. Staff left the door open just out of general spite. We waited. Had restraints removed. Waited. Stripped out and got a set of blues to change into. Waited. Received a net bag with blankets and sheets, a towel and a wash cloth. Waited. Spoke to a nurse. Waited.

Somewhere in the middle of that, I think I slept with my eyes open.

Someone told me I was heading to L5. I got a styrofoam container that held a leather meat patty of the dead variety, a few spoons of cardboard potato flakes, two slices of white bread, and frozen apple chunks.

Clearly the prisoners' demand from the 1993 uprising that prison officials improve the food quality has been extremely slow in being implemented. 2015, the food still sucks.

L5. Where the 1993 uprising started. I'm in cell 37, which has scorch marks inadequately painted over. The bars of my cell are the ugliest color green you've ever seen.

For prisoners, there are 3 periods of Lucasville history: pre-Uprising, Uprising, and post-Uprising. For us, the Uprising was a period of weeks in April and May of 1993. But for ODRC employees and, in particular, Lucasville employees, there are two periods of Lucasville history: pre-riot and NOW.

For them, the Lucasville Uprising never ended. Prisoners are in an enemy camp just waiting to pounce and kill them all, and staff make sure that when that spillage of human fluids finally and inevitably resumes, prisoners will not so much as break even. They have resolved to make enough prisoners bleed and suffer that the next outbreak of serious prisoner violence will be nothing more than paying it forward.

The fascists are keeping score.

Employees who came to work here after the riot and had no direct experience of the uprising are indoctrinated into the collective memory. They are traumatized vicariously, by proxy, the mythology passed down, ensuring that the revenge kick will never cease.

It's all very over-the-top when you consider that only one prison guard died, and he wasn't likely to find a cure for cancer in the first place. His name was Vallandingham. If he had died in a swimming pool drain accident, which is a much greater odds on chance than dying in a prison riot, pools today may be considerably safer due to the outrage of all of his co-workers, and the prison at Lucasville would be far less brutal. But, he had the dumb luck of sputtering out in the midst of a prison riot.

And so it goes.

Now his former co-workers and the genius who replaced him comemorate the life and death of this one organism out of seven billion by turning the prison at Lucasville into a seething hate hole.

I spent my first 3 nights curled up with my mattress on the floor next to the radiator. Third night, the heat cut off. After a week in the same underwear, I gave up on getting my property. I stripped naked and ran around on all fours,

feeding on raw meat and wiping my ass by scooting on the floor like a dog.
That's just a natural response to the reductive programming administered at
the end of a billy club.

Turning humans wild.

Lucasville may well be one of those experiences where even those who
survive it don't make it out alive.

Wish me luck...

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<http://seanswain.org/prison-bus-to-shitville/>